November 2012

Gender equality and social cohesion: Reflection on the experiences of strengthening teacher education in Pakistan

Dilshad Ashraf
Aga Khan University, dilshad.ashraf@aku.edu

Kausar Waqar
Aga Khan University, kausar.waqar@aku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck

Part of the Gender and Sexuality Commons, Other Educational Administration and Supervision Commons, and the Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck/233
GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL COHESION: REFLECTION ON THE EXPERIENCES OF STRENGTHENING TEACHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Dilshad Ashraf and Dr Kausar Waqar, Aga Khan University Institute for Education, Pakistan

Introduction

A review of literature suggests that discourse on social cohesion centers around social inclusion, which fosters the empowerment of disadvantaged groups for their enhanced participation in society. Such grounding of social cohesion necessitates a critical appraisal of gender relationship in the society. As such, gender’s cross cutting nature makes it an important dimension of all equity and inclusion related discussions. On the basis of insights from our experience of prompting gender equality through ‘Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan’ project of the Institute for Educational Development of Aga Khan University, this paper presents a discussion on gender equality and social cohesion. In particular, by drawing on relevant literature, an attempt is made to problematize if gender equality is a precondition or can be regarded as a necessary outcomes of social cohesion.

Social Cohesion: Understanding the Concept in a Context

Social cohesion is widely used but rarely explicitly defined. For many social cohesion means a society with relative harmony possibly with no social exclusion. Battaini-Dragoni and Dominioni (2003) consider social cohesion as an indication of a society that is able to ensure the well-being of its members who form mutually supportive community of free individuals. These individual follow democratic means to pursue common goals. The later warrants high levels of civic co-operation and trust. Green (2006) considers tolerance and relative equality key characteristics of such society. Jensen (as cited in Green, 2006) considers that the term social cohesion is used to describe a process more than a condition or end state which according to her involves a sense of commitment and a desire or capacity of individual to live together in harmony. This may also be seen as possessing shared norms and values, shared identity and belongingness. Green (2006), however, refers to Jensen who thinks a socially cohesive society does not necessarily involve widely shared values, since too much ‘bonding’ and value conformity can lead to stagnation and closed communities. Furthermore, Jenson (as referred by Green, 2006) explains that cohesive societies do relay of democratic institutions and on effective institutional mechanisms to resolve the conflicts and hence ensures civic participation.

Literature search provides an evidence of huge engagement of scholars, policy makers and practitioners in exploring how diverse communities provide an evidence of social cohesion. For instance, diverse religious affiliation of the communities in Britain (e.g. King, 2010) has
been explored through investigating influence of faith-based schools on social cohesion. Maxwell (1996) and others (e.g. Jeannotte, 1997; McDaniel, 2003) have attempted to define and understand social cohesion and ethnic diversity in Canadian context. A review of literature also highlights scholarly work from developing countries such as Malaysia (e.g. Shamsul & Yusoff, 2011) and India (e.g. Mukherjee & Sarawati year?) which explores social cohesion with reference to ethnic, religious and gender diversity.

**Relativity of the Definition**

Discourse on social cohesion explains its relative nature as there seems to be no agreement on how social cohesion should be defined. Beauvais and Jenson (2002) associate this fluidity of the concept of social cohesion to its situatedness within political realm. They consider SC as a quasi-concept, the definition of which is shaped and guided by political motives. Hence, its utility, according to Beauvais and Jenson (2002), will depend “on its contribution to framing conversations, to helping to make sense of complex relationships, and to setting goals” (p.44). A critical view of concept of social cohesion was also presented by Bernard (as reported by Fenger, 2008) who described it as a “quasi-concept” a concept based on analysis of a situation, but which maintains a vagueness “flexible enough to follow the meanderings and necessities of political action from day to day” (Bernard, 2000, p. 3). Important dimension of criticism is that such definitions of social cohesion propose compassion and promotion of certain values and do not necessarily warrant correction of social inequalities and how various institutions contribute to these challenges in a society.

Different definitions of social cohesion, nevertheless, lead to an argument that a high degree of social cohesion contributes measurably to economic growth and investment, to good governance, health and social security (Stanley, 2003; Maxwell, 1996 as quoted by Mukherjee& Sarawati, 2011). Operationalization of the concept “social cohesion” will depend on the definition employed which can also provide base for measuring its effects. There is no unanimous position on whether social cohesion is a cause or a consequence of other aspects of social, economic and political life. The review of research on social cohesion by Beauvais and Jensonp (2002) also highlights discussions in literature about social cohesion as dependent variable or as independent variable, social cohesion as cause or as an outcome. When social cohesion is analyzed as an outcome, the factors affecting it can be grouped under the headings of economic restructuring, diversit y, and the characteristics of some communities.

Beauvais and Jensonp (2002) have indicated the increased attention to the capacity of well-designed strategic action to foster social cohesion as a dependent variable. They find that limited attention in literature, is given to actors in civil society. With some reference to employers, families, and to the citizens, huge attention is paid to the state and governance forms. Some literature, according to Beauvais and Jenson (2002), identifies cultural policy and education as important ingredients for fostering social cohesion. A need to make investments in children is
also highlighted. Following this line of argument, utility of social cohesion for setting goals towards a peaceful society is just desired in the context of education.

**Table: The key components of social cohesion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>belonging/isolation</td>
<td>common values and civic culture territorial belonging and identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society</td>
<td>participation/non-involvement</td>
<td>social networks and social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>inclusion/exclusion recognition/rejection</td>
<td>social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Order</td>
<td>legitimacy/illegitimacy</td>
<td>social order and social control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ref. Reeskens, 2008

In her later attritions, Jenson (2008/9) has proposed a set of indicators to assess social cohesion as Social inclusion: access to financial resources; access to financial activity; access to education and human capital; access to health; and access to technology. Other indicators are to view social cohesion as cultural and ethnic homogeneity; as trust; and as participation and solidarity. These indicators when utilized effectively can change societal make up.

Silver’s (as quoted by Beauvais and Jenson, 2002) analysis of various European Union programs found that social cohesion policies focused social exclusion issues of isolation, passivity and powerlessness with a multidimensional and dynamic approach to foster empowerment, engagement and active participation of integration of the marginalized ethnic groups. However, the notion of quality remains problematic as the analysis reiterates the need to encourage active participation of those marginalized communities in their own empowerment.

**Gender and Social Cohesion**

An analysis of all the proposed definitions of social cohesion reveals a consensus on social inclusion and equity fundamental to the demonstration of social cohesion. With equity Delport (2009) suggests social justice as a key component for social cohesion. In her commentary on a report “Social Cohesion and Social Justice in South Africa”, Delport (2009) explains social justice as a key component for social cohesion which means that how individuals and groups are treated with fairness and equity in terms of access to and participation in different realms of a society. Considering gender equality as a cross cutting dimension of a cohesive society, Delport (2009) situates the social cohesion discussion within the discourse of social justice and human rights. Policy frameworks, legislations and political feel, she found, all supportive to social cohesion and gender equality. However, women in Africa, as Delport explains with a reference
to a UN study, face many blocks i.e. social, political economic. Hence, she concludes, social cohesion does not necessarily extend to women.

Similar argument has also been forward by McDaniel (2003) who identifies gender faultlines which needs to be addressed for ensuring the spirit of social cohesion. McDaniel (2003) argues that the knit of social fabric is dependent on relationality, on social caring and connectedness, on a sense of social cohesion. Questions about social cohesion, according to her, centre on a sense of growing inequalities compounded by increasing diversities. She identifies gender as an important dimension of social cohesion relationality and also regards it as an important question around inequalities and increasing diversity in society. Addressing gender faultlines, according to McDaniel, is an important first step to ensure social cohesion. She identifies an influence of globalizing market on gender fault-lines which warrants an examination of emerging tendencies and counter tendencies that reflect in issues around gender and age and gender gap in political attitude, changing patterns and nature of life and of a family. These issues ultimately arise as a concern in the promotion of social cohesion.

As far as gender equality is concerned situation of many high growth countries is not any different from African nations which face daunting struggle for human development have paid attention to social cohesion in the face of growing diversity. Barnes, Bouchama and Loiseau (2011) argue that despite all the progress made in addressing gender inequality in these countries during the past two decades, women continue to lose out in terms of their wealth and well-being in comparison to men across much of the world. They hold persistence of discriminatory social institutions’ inability to improve gender relationships responsible for women’s disadvantage. Barnes et al (2011) also postulate that these social norms, values and traditions constrain women’s access to resources and decision making power which result into less than ideal performance on human development indicators such as health, employment and political participation.

In their evaluation report around gender equality and social cohesion, Kelles-Viitanen and Shrestha (2011) have critically examined how women were excluded from the process and outcomes of sustained peace and inclusive development in Nepal. Their review has revealed that despite commitments to end gender discrimination, gender-responsive polices and legislations are yet to be translated into action. In their evaluation of steps taken to end gender based inequalities for better social inclusion Kelles-Viitanen and Shrestha (2011) found that deep seated cultural norms and practices continue to deter efforts towards gender equality as women are primarily viewed in their role as wives and mothers. They also raised an issue with the conceptualization and implementation of gender equality related initiatives. They found that gender was often equated with activities for girls and women rather than actions that address the relations between men and women. This understanding, hence, “leads to interpreting gender integration as means to focus on women as a target group, rather than to be a process of carrying out a gender analysis and identifying areas of gender inequalities, whether of men or of women,
that can be redressed through appropriate programming” (Kelles-Viitanen & Shrestha, 2011, p. vii).

Despite some signs of progress such as gender parity in primary education, women’s participation in economic activity and improvement in reproductive and maternal health, women continue to suffer in terms of wealth and well-being in comparison to men across much of the world. This, according to Barnes, Bouchama and Loiseau (2011) has “consequences not just for women and girls, but also for men, boys and society as a whole given as ongoing gender inequalities undermine the inclusion and participation of women, erode the trust and social capital that exists at the community and national level and compromises the social mobility of millions of women and their families” (p.3). Barnes et al. (2011) argue that the gender neutral structural changes during the past two decades in many countries have affected and shaped men and women’s interactions with the informal institutions, relationships and identities that underlie social cohesion. Women’s vulnerability, marginalization with compromised social mobility will continue if such discriminatory norms, structures and practices are not challenged.

Barnes et al (2011) used Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) to determine how countries within different categories of four-speed world classification i.e. affluent, converging, struggling, poor perform on gender discrimination at the hands of social cohesion. The data show that even with the high growth rate 13 converging countries scored high on SIGI which reflects poor performance on account of gender equality in health, education, labour force participation and political representation. One such country is Pakistan that is classified as converging country but has also scored higher on SIGI. With about 80% primary enrolment ratio, the country’s youth female (15-24 years) literacy rate is reported at 58% which is not only much lower for average rate (98%) for converging countries but is also lower than Nigeria and Sudan. Health and employment opportunities shows challenging situation with country performing above than average of converging countries around women’ parliamentarians.

Barnes et al (2011) invite a critical appraisal of discriminatory social institutions to establish the reasons for gender unequal outcomes of development in converging countries like Pakistan. Such an analysis, they believe, will also allow gender related policy interventions to transform communities.

World Economic Forum’s (2013)Global Gender Gap Index further confirming the analysis offered by Barnes et al (2011) captures the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities and tracks their progress. Pakistan’s position on various development indicators including education is captured in the tables below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Gap Index 2013 (out of 136 countries)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over all ;</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>0.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Participation:</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>0.311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are four categories namely women’s health and survival, their educational attainment and equal economic participation and opportunity termed the “four pillars” of socio-economic gender inequalities that make up the Global Gender Gap Index. It has ranked Pakistan as 135 in 2013, a ranking which has dropped from 132 in 2006 to 135 in 2013. This makes it lowest in Asia and the Pacific region indicating that the state of gender-based biases in Pakistan is abominable and worse, stagnant. The country ranked 124 on women’s health and survival, 129 on their educational attainment and a staggering 135 again on equal economic participation and opportunity.

Pakistan’s strengths are the number of its women in Parliament and in ministerial positions, sex ratio at birth, and female enrolment in tertiary education. But this positive position is obscured by her weaknesses which include low positions in health life expectancy, enrolment in primary and secondary education, overall literacy rate, professional and technical workers, legislators, senior officials and managers, wage equality, labor force participation.

### Gender Equality Efforts a Potential Contribution to Social Cohesion

In this section, we examine gender equality related situation in Pakistan. Later we situate the initiatives of STEP project to determine contribution of the same towards social cohesion.

Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan (STEP) project investigated and made interventions for addressing prevalent gender related issues in education in its target areas. An important success of this project is the gathering of data about the current gender related challenges in the target area. This anecdotal data was collected during the AEDOs and Dos courses. This was a group work therefore all the personal from the district gave their input. This data is important as it gives us an overview of the current situation regarding gender issues in these districts from high level sources and therefore are helpful is the development of District profiles. These participants represented ten districts and were supervising 3877 schools for both male and female
students, out of which 3584 were Primary schools, 279 middle and 14 elementary and high
schools. The participants were given a guiding question to focus on their presentation, which was
“What gender related issues and challenges are present in your district and what if anything do
you do to overcome it?”

The presentations by the district officials showed that the main problems in the area regarding
gender were issues of female mobility which is restricted. Safety of female teachers from
harassment during their travel to far flung areas could not be guaranteed. Their travel
unaccompanied by male members of their family is frowned upon by the community therefore
this is not possible even when individuals themselves have fewer concerns about it. Due to large
geographical spread and prevailing law and order situation travelling is very expensive also.

Mobility and access to school is a problem for girls and women as teachers and students, female
schools do not have teachers, therefore girls and their families feel comfortable if the girl child is
accompanied by their brother to the school.

Lack of facilities like schools for females, female teachers, and when school is present it lacks
essential components like boundary wall, lavatory and water which are very important if these
are not there then girls do not come to schools.
Gender discrimination, patriarchal and male dominance in the society, results in some parents
not being motivated to support girl education. Community mobilization and involvement in
addressing the gender related issues is also a problem. It was shared that in this district male
teachers cannot venture into female schools freely and vice versa. Any teacher seeking support
of a male teacher or community member does so at the risk of having her character questioned.

Another issue is community awareness and conviction of importance of girl education.
An incident was narrated that a brother of a girl attended school for 1 year with his sister only for
supervision purpose to see if any undesirable activity was going on in schools. After a year he
stopped coming because he was satisfied that nothing was wrong. Poverty is another factor
compounding the issues of girl education there. Poor quality of education, many reported, was an
important reason for dropouts.
This anecdotal data and account of the prevailing situation is confirmed by other empirical sources. World
Economic Forum report has been mentioned above. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2013
reports on enrolment of children in schools and out of school children sub categorized by gender and
socioeconomic status.
STEP and Commitment towards Gender Equality

Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan (STEP) program is designed to improve the quality and delivery of elementary education services appropriate to the poor, particularly women and children, by strengthening professional development and performance of teachers, teacher educators and education managers. A key aspect of the program is its strategic approach to gender equality. STEP is aiming to improve gender equality for students, teachers and administrators in the Pakistan education sector with a particular reference to the project’s focused regions. This is done through ensuring gender integration into all STEP programmatic activities including curriculum and curriculum materials of the
professional development programs, induction of course participants and project staff, documentation and monitoring and evaluation processes. Another important focus has been improving women’s equal participation in STEP program. With an understanding of women’s unique circumstances a case to case approach has been used to address women’s challenges in order to retain them in the programs.

The project has two main programs for improving the performance of its teachers. These are Cluster Based Mentoring Program (CBMP) and Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP). By using a cascade approach, the CBMP has developed 139 teachers as mentors to work with teachers of the schools which together form a cluster. These Mentors work with selected teachers referred to as ‘mentee teachers” for their professional development in four subject areas i.e., math, Science, Social Studies and English and Gender Equality in Education. These professional development activities include conducting workshops for mentee teachers, follow-up visits to the mentee teachers’ classrooms to provide feedback and support. The mentors followed the same process and approach taken by the STEP gender equality team in training them for their own mentees. The initial focus of these workshops was on basic concepts in the areas of Gender e.g., Gender and sex, gender discrimination, gender division of labor, gender mainstreaming gender analysis etc. After this initial basic proficiency has been achieved the focus has been on developing the teachers to achieving equality in schools and classrooms by ensuring gender sensitive instruction in trainings/classrooms.

A total of 20 schools currently participation in STEP project’ Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP) Initiative which through a systematic and efforts makes an attempt to improve learning opportunities and conditions for all learners. It is envisaged that a gender equality lens will help these WSIP schools to put concentrated efforts in improving quality of a) teaching learning processes and environment, b) leadership and management practices, c) curriculum implementation, d) staff development, e) community participation, and students’ learning outcomes.

Gender equality in the schools is linked with gender equality (or inequalities) in the larger community. This perspective has warranted community engagement important strategic move of STEP. For effective involvement of the community in its goal of promoting gender equality in society, STEP has undertaken activities such as the celebration of International Women Day in each of its target districts. The programs of these events are focused on certain themes which highlight the prevailing gender issues. Topics like “healthy girls, healthy families, healthy communities” helped the communities to focus on issues like equal opportunities in getting nutrition, health care etc. for all including women and girls. The project has developed connections at grassroot levels with community and reaches children through WSIP and CBMP programs. Through its programs and efforts the project is reaching out to a large number of teachers, teacher educators, education managers and local community to help these stakeholders recognize and address gender issues in their context.

During the efforts to bring more women to the project programs in order to ensure some degree of parity in number of project beneficiaries, the team realized that each woman’s
circumstances were unique and that laying one policy for facilitating the program participants will not help achieve the goals. Therefore a ‘Case to case approach’ was taken. This approach emphasized that each individual has unique circumstances and they especially women face gender related problems which arise from the norms and traditions of the particular are which they belong to. Therefore the solutions to these problems also needed to be individualized. For example, in some rural areas of the project’s target districts mobility of women within the area as well as travel to Karachi (venue for trainings and other project professional development activities was restricted to a large extent more so when women needed to travel alone without any male family member). Addressing this restriction on women’s mobility meant that the project not only facilitated the female course participant to travel to program site, but also supported travel of their male chaperones. This allowed many women to take part in the programs which otherwise was not possible. Another case exemplifies the complexity of the prevalent situation. In this particular situation the female student being given scholarship for pursuing M.Ed. studies belonged to a religious minority community facing forced conversions and marriages to religious majority. The family of the girl feared not only losing their family member to this tendency but also were apprehensive that the girl might not receive any marriage proposals if it was known that she had been living away from her family un-chaperoned. The scholarship provisions included boarding facility, which in this case was not acceptable to the female student’s family. Therefore, to ensure her participation in the program her family arranged for her to live with one of her close relatives in the city while the project provided for transport. Making this adjustment allowed the project to retain one more female beneficiary.

Retrospective analysis of views and reflection of the participants of various courses highlights a deep sense of desired gender equality in education. Despite all the efforts, project could not induct the desired number of women participants in the programs offered in Sindh and Baluchistan. One of the most important explanations of this phenomenon was women’s subordinate position in the society which results into scrutiny of women’s conduct including mobility at the hands of male family members and the society. In one instance, project’s gender consultant made a telephone call to a prospective female participant of a course. The call was received by the husband who right away shared that his wife would not attend the course. When asked the reason for his wife not attending the course, he said, “She is not attending because I do not want her to do”. With this he disconnected the call. In another instance, a female participant of a course reported that her grown up (already married) had not spoken to her since she came to Karachi to attend the course. Such is the resistance facing women if they attempt to deviate from the societal norms around women’s conduct in the society.

**Fundamental Premise for Gender Equality Related Work with Mentors**

Gender equality at students’ level is linked with teachers’ ability to demonstrate gender equitable practices. With an aim to improve gender equality in teaching learning process, project’s gender equality strategy helps mentors to develop the required knowledge and skills. It is expected that mentors’ understanding of gender aware teaching and learning
strategies and curriculum materials would improve teachers’ and students’ understanding of equality which will go long way to create equal opportunities in education and other domains.

**Process**

The process of ascertaining possibilities of promoting gender equality in education begins with teacher mentors unpacking their views around gender relationships in society. The project team working on Gender issues designed many interactive exercises to push start and facilitate this process. The sessions with teacher mentors helped them develop understanding of gender concepts, gender equality and issues of gender inequities in education and in their immediate context. Mentors sharpened their skill of doing analysis of case studies which had been developed from real life examples from the classrooms, schools and the communities. Analysis of curriculum and curriculum materials was yet another important exercise regularly undertaken by the mentors. Importantly, reference to local researches on issues of gender inequalities in education was important strategy to help the mentors situate the challenge of gender inequalities in their local context. Project has taken an incremental approach to help these mentors develop understanding of key concepts of gender. This incremental approach takes a simpler to complex route with presenting and explaining the concepts. This approach has strengthened mentors’ ability to work with their mentee teachers to develop gender equitable teaching environment in their classroom.

During their professional activities, Mentors attempt to integrate gender perspective in teaching practice. Their constant engagement with the key concepts of gender and skills and knowledge of integrating gender perspective in teaching and learning has led to development of their own workshop plans which they have implemented for their mentee teachers.

**Evidence of Changing Practices**

Mentors and other project staff report that teachers now are able to recognize stereotypical gender beliefs about science and math teaching and learning processes. They also recognize that textbooks do not promote gender equality which requires alternate explanations/materials by the teachers.

Use of gender sensitive language in lesson planning and its delivery by the mentee teachers seems to be an evidence of change reported through project districts. Other important change in the mentee teachers’ classroom is that they ensure equal participation of girls and boys in classroom activities. Many would assign leadership roles to girls during group work which is one important aspect of girls’ active participation in teaching and learning processes. Importantly, mentors and mentee teachers are found integrating gender equality perspective in the teaching learning materials and displays. However, we understand that the process of awareness of mentees about gender equality and incorporation of this perspective in their classroom teaching and learning is slow and requires persistent efforts.
Journey of Change as Experienced by the Individuals

The relationship between gender equality and cohesion is a direct one as more equal society is a more cohesive society where respect for one another despite diversity is abundant. It is logical that this respect for each other may lead to acceptance of equal status of men and women. In view of this, the potential contribution of gender equality measures to social cohesion in the STEP project work is abundantly clear. However, the deep rootedness of gender beliefs—the process of equipping someone with willingness and skills and knowledge to recognize and to address gender issues begins with unpacking gender related beliefs. This complexity poses enormous challenge which if addressed can have long term impact on more cohesive society with better gender relationships and empowered women.

An example of the deep seated cultural norms and practices which view women and girls as mothers and wives only, not allowing them any other expression of their self is a story of a female teacher shared during one of the project’s professional development sessions. The facilitator noticed that this particular teacher had excellent language skills, her choice of words was apt and she was very eloquent. Upon some probes about her language ability by the facilitators, this teacher shared that she was a literary person having written many volumes of prose as well as poetry. She wanted to get these published in her name but her brother stopped her from doing so by telling her that it was not a woman’s domain to be a writer and to express openly about issues of society and her personal feelings. He said that if you want it published he can help her but only if she assumes a male pseudonym. This teacher shared that this was unacceptable to her as she wanted to be known as herself. As the brother saw that she was determined to go on to do her will, one day during her absence he destroyed all her volumes leaving her bereft of her life’s work. This poignant story explicates the lived experience of inequality facing women in the communities which are focused by STEP.

From very onset we realized that in order to address inequalities in society, we need to draw particular attention to how men and women participate in activities in society to the discourse. Kelles-Viitanen and Shrestha (2011) found that deep seated cultural norms and practices continue to deter efforts towards gender equality as women are primarily viewed in their role as wives and mothers. This view is mirrored in the way women and girls are represented in textbooks and the roles they are presented in during the process of teaching and learning. Hence a deliberate approach was used to draw men as well as women participants into the process of analysis of socially constructed masculine and feminine attributes norms and practices. These processes engaged the participants in identifying connections between the disparities in education and gender inequalities in society. Many recognized the dichotomies in their lived experiences. The initial discussions focused on unpacking their beliefs and seeking to juxtapose them with their practices regarding gender inequality issues. During these sessions, the deep rootedness of participants’ beliefs in patriarchal structures with amalgamation of ‘religious viewpoints’ became abundantly clear. Despite the fact that the group has women participants, many strongly associated themselves within the gendered division of labour and hence considered four walls of home as women’s space and fulfilling their domestic chores was recognized the prime responsibility. Of
particular interest is a story of a male participant of CBMP program. He was part of the program since the beginning and was never a prominent contributor to class discussions. After about two years into the project activities one day he voluntarily shared that he was a staunch believer of the traditional role divide among men and women, and went quite far with his practice of the same. He would expect his wife to take care of the household, his children and also his personal needs. He would expect her to offer him water as soon as he entered the house. After that he would sit in a chair and expected her to take off his shoes for him. He expected his children to be neat and clean well fed and ready for school every day without any contribution from his side. After sharing these practices he described the transformation in his personal belief and practices as a result of participation in the project. He told us how he takes care of his children’s morning cleaning and bathing rituals preparing them for school, while his wife prepares breakfast. After this they all sit together to eat and he takes the children to school. He attributed this three hundred and sixty degree turn about to the discussions in the sessions and the activities which were part of the educating process. The most significant aspect of this incident is that he had the strength of conviction to come out openly with his changed stance in front of his colleagues without fear of losing face and respect as his compatriots belonged to the same value and belief system.

In majority of the project’s target districts propagation of family and family values was thought to be a basic raison d’être for women. One project beneficiary recorded his understanding of women’s position in society by saying that in his view women are only there ‘to obey men’ and that houses were appropriate places for them. Inherent in this belief is their assumption that women’s needs and wants extend to only resources available within the household and to whatever men provide for them. This particular person also explained the change in his views towards the end of the project, where he recorded that he was so surprised when he realized that women may need and want more than what is provided for her in the house. So essentially his thinking about women took on a more humanized shape as his understanding of gender equality enhanced. He shared his commitment to working for gender equality in his work as a teacher educator in future. This kind of conversion in ideology can only strengthen the social fabric of society.

Another strong belief was the sanctity of women as a person. One participant shared that “we believe women to be very sacred and we give them all our respect. We think women’s sacredness is seven times more that the holy book (Quran)”. The dichotomy inherent between the expressed belief and practice of honor killing and making girls give up their right to be married in the name of religion was not apparent to the participants. McDaniel (2003) argues that the knit of social fabric being dependent on relationality, on social caring and connectedness, on a sense of social cohesion comes into play at this point. Women as holders of rights to life and of attaining their potential and self-actualization and the practice of denying them these rights without any remorse on the part of the society that subscribes to these values displays the lived dichotomy of the society. McDaniel’s identification of the growing inequalities among genders as important dimensions of social cohesion calls for addressing these gender fault-lines. The STEP projects interventions in its target districts as has been discussed were important first steps to ensure social cohesion.
Social cohesion cannot be achieved until the professional as well as personal lives of people does not show the gender equality features. The institution of family is the basic structure and building block of society. Gender equality within the family and more specifically among husband and wife is essential for a cohesive structure. However this ideal is well beyond the reach of many women. Many women cannot even imagine their husbands to be in a subordinate or a lower social position than them. One participants’ story exemplifies how this position changed as a result of the project interventions. This husband and wife were both part of the project. The husband expected that his wife would take care of his needs within the house when he himself took no responsibility of taking care of house chores and children, also maintaining this subordinate position in the professional life too. However the wife is a hard working individual and was able to enhance her professional expertise to the extent that she was in a leadership position in the project as lead and Mentor teacher. This resulted in her husband becoming her “mentee teacher” sitting in her professional development sessions as a learner and taking feedback from her on his teaching and professional activities. The acceptance of this position not only within their own family, but also in the professional circle is a testimony of the success of the project in addressing the gender faultlines.

Project documents many such example of shifting positions as reported by male and female participants.

The experience I am going through in the M.Ed. program is an eye opener for me, let alone developing awareness about wide spread gender inequities in the society. Having been raised in an environment replete with gender prejudices I offered women biased treatment as an accepted social norm; when started working as a teacher I did not pay much attention to the girls in my class room. Now I find myself much more equipped to tackle gender based issues in my school when I return to teaching.

M.Ed. student (male) who attended ‘Gender and Education’ course

One important evidence and precondition of changing gender relationship is indeed women’s ability to recognize their agency. Many women felt that power within and realized their worth in the equation of gendered fabric of the society. A woman mentee teacher narrated her narrative of change proudly to the external reviewers who were to document project as a mid-term review exercise. She, as a member of a marginalized community which has little or no value for women’s education, has now taken up responsibility of changing life opportunities for young girls and women in her community. Her strategies include workshops/sessions for women and discussions with members of her community. Another such narrative is presented in the vignette below.

My brothers are foreign qualified but they forced me to wear a veil and insist on making decisions for me. I have showed them the material shared with us in the classm last time to make them realize their practices. I will further work on them as well as with my mentees. This is a challenging work for me.

Female participant of a gender workshop
Importantly, women’s sense of agency, we felt, was an important first step towards their personal and professional freedom. While many continue their struggle towards this end, some women have recognized their pathways leading to a gender equitable society.

**Gender Equality and Social Cohesion**

Emphasis on teaching and learning and the project’s work to enhance women’s participation in programs highlighted the groundedness of gender inequalities in the society. Retrospective analysis of views and reflection of the participants of various courses highlights a deep sense of desired gender equality in education. Gender equality attempts in education, to some extent, have affected immediate communities around schools where mentors are their mentee teachers are located. While a detail of this phenomenon as yet to be investigated, STEP’s gender equality related provides a premise for a discussion around its relationship with potentials of promoting social cohesion in the society.

Earlier discussions on gender equality and social cohesion can be now revisited on the context of STEP’s attempts of addressing, in the words of McDaniel (2003), gender faultlines which she thinks needs to be examined if cohesive society is the desired outcome. A consideration of social justice as key principle of social cohesion which, according to Delport (2009), requires equity based treatment to the individuals and groups to ensure an access to and participation in different realms of a society. Review of social cohesion related initiatives in different contexts by Delport (2009), Barnes et al, and Kelles-Viitanen and Shrestha (2011) suggest that many countries have developed comprehensive policy interventions towards prompting cohesiveness in their societies. However, such policy interventions have withered short and implementation or have not equally benefitted women who are excluded from the process of development due to the deep-rooted patriarchal cultural norms. Examples from STEP’s work on gender equality have also demonstrated such a challenge in the contexts of Sindh and Baluchistan. The norm of women’s restricted mobility and stringent measures of maintain gender division of labour are two visible constrains in women’s participation in educational development efforts which ultimately hinder gender equality- important attribute of a cohesive society.

**Recommendations**

On the basis of the discussion on social cohesion and gender equality across the globe, we recommend following:

Considering gender equality as a cross cutting dimension of a cohesive society, as suggested by Delpot (2009), we need to situate the social cohesion discussion within the discourse of social justice and human rights. Furthermore, gender as an important dimension of social cohesion warrants addressing inequalities around gender and increasing diversity in society which, according to McDaniel, is an important first step to ensure social cohesion.

Policy interventions and legislations needs to be mindful of deeply ingrained gender discriminatory cultural norms. As examples from STEP’s interventions have demonstrated,
critical engagement of individuals in examining their own position of gender equality is important precursor of all policy related interventions. Such an approach has potentials for successful policy implementation towards aspiration for a cohesive society.

**Policy Context for Pakistan**

Pakistan’s National Education Policy (2009) and National Youth Development Policy and Youth Development Policy of Punjab have promises of providing equal education and development opportunities to all and sundry. The context which is marred with political, ethnic, language and class differences has yet to go long way to discover what policy interventions will promote trust and respect for diversity. Aspirations to achieve shared goal around national good are yet to be developed. Till that time comes, education policy needs to be implemented with greater focus on gender equality in education and through education. By building on the lessons learnt from STEP, teacher education programs need to develop curricula which would facilitate teachers and other future education leaders to promote gender equitable teaching learning environment.

**Theorizing Gender Equality and Social Cohesion**

To prepare policy context, the academicians and researchers needs to engage in theorization of gender equality in the context of social cohesion. Gender equality initiatives have been regularly part of development discourse. Researching such undertakings will help see equality in the larger context of a desired cohesive society.

**References**

Battaini-Dragoni, G. & Dominioni, S. (28-29 Nov. 2003). The Council of Europe’s strategy for social cohesion. Paper presented in Conference on Social Cohesion, Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service


Barnes, K., Bouchama, N. & Loiseau, E. (January 2011) OECD Development Centre January 2011


The Global Gender Gap Report 2013: published by the World Economic Forum

Annual status of education report ASER-Pakistan 2013